

MONDAY, AUGUST 5, 1968

Science And Man—

Remarkable Appeal From Soviet Scientist

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The Washington Post Syndicate
1968

Scientists are often blanketed with the indictment of indifference to the human consequences of their experimental discoveries. Some have, to be sure, such a frightening glimpse of the future that they escape with relief to the refuge of their laboratories. Most simply do not know how to communicate with non-specialists about matters of ultimate importance.

The Soviet physicist, Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov, is a scientist who has dared to speak out. His manifesto, translated from the Russian and published in all its 10,000 words by the New York Times on July 22, would have been a courageous dissent even within the liberal tradition of western countries.

For it dares to reiterate what articulate scientists throughout the world have tried to say for 23 years: man's technical power to befoul the earth had made obsolete the traditional form of human organization into rival, sovereign nations. We adhere to nationalism and its trapings at the peril of the species. To find new forms is the categorical imperative of the intellectual's conscience. But we do not know how to achieve them, and the man who insists on reminding us of the crucial unreachable is indicted for meddling, for caring too much.

Sakharov's appeal is all the more remarkable as an open shout of defiance of the Communist Party bureaucracy at a critical time in the evolution of European Socialism. The internal conflict between a doctrinaire Communist Party and a pragmatic Soviet Government is mirrored in the trial and imprisonment of writers like Daniel and Galanskov and in the divergent tones of Brezhnev's and Kosygin's recent speeches. Externally, the Soviet reaction to the resurgence of liberalism in Czechoslovakia remains, at this writing, an unresolved crisis.

Sakharov poses two undeniable theses. "The division of mankind threatens it with destruction;"

and "intellectual freedom is essential to human society—freedom to obtain and distribute information, freedom for open-minded and unfearing debate and freedom from pressure by officialdom and prejudices."

These theses are inevitably intertwined. Minds are closed by fear; fear keeps the nations apart.

It is important to the USSR and to America, as well perhaps to Sakharov himself, that we read his message and express our appreciation of the basic theses. The USSR should learn that we are capable of understanding the needs of a people who are emerging from the sufferings of a half-century of revolution, Stalinism and Hitlerism.

The capacity of a society to tolerate liberal dissent helps to predict its conformance to its contracted obligations and its dedication to humanitarian as against geopolitical objectives. Needless to say, we must apply the same measures to our own shortcomings and those of our allies.

We must still unravel a host of complicated issues. Our immediate affirmation of a plea for intellectual freedom is not an intrusive attack on the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe, but a concern for how brutally such power may be used. The continued balkanization (or should we say "africanization") of Europe into independent military and political forces remains the worst peril to its political stability. Exactly the same principles justify our support of NATO while we work for new concepts of European and then world government.

The U. S. military presence in Europe is now less important as a hostage-deterrent against communist expansion than to fill a vacuum that would otherwise attract an independent German force inevitably susceptible to the most dangerous nationalistic pressures.

In this year of paradox, the Kremlin's main anxieties about its western frontiers may come from the threat of unilateral American disengagement.